

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6243

INFO USINT ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 1785

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, TSBULY

SUBJECT: FRENCH VIEWS ON TUNISIAN-LIBYAN MERGER

SUMMARY: QUAI OFFICIAL GAVE US FRENCH VIEWS ON EVENTS
SURROUNDING THE TUNISIAN-LIBYAN MERGER. HE THOUGHT THE ABORTED
UNION WOULD HURT BOURGUIBA'S PRESTIGE, BUT THAT QADHAFI WOULD
REMAIN LARGELY UNTOUCHED. END SUMMARY.

1. DURING JANUARY 18 DISCUSSION OF TUNISIANLIBYAN MERGER WITH
AMBASSADOR WITMAN AND EMBOFF, QUAI'S DE COMMINES, DIRECTOR FOR
NEAR EAST AND AFRICA, MADE A NUMBER OF INTERESTING OBSERVATIONS.
AFTER UNDERLINING FRENCH SURPRISE
WITH THE UNION, HE REFERRED TO
FONMIN JOBERT'S MID-NOVEMBER 1973 VISIT TO TUNIS DURING WHICH
FONMIN MASMOUDI HAD TALKED A GREAT DEAL WITH JOBERT ABOUT HIS OWN
PROBLEMS. THE LATTER HAD BEEN IMPRESSED BY MASMOUDI'S
SENTIMENT OF BEING ISOLATED IN THE ATMOSPHERE OF INTRIGUE THAT
SURROUNDS BOURGUIBA. MASMOUDI FELT HIMSELF THREATENED BY
THE CLIQUES FORMING IN THE SUCCESSION STRUGGLE AROUND
MADAME BOURGUIBA, WHO WAS INCREASINGLY INFLUENTIAL AND
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BOURGUIBA JUNIOR, WHOSE HEALTH WAS 95 PERCENT RECOVERED.

MASMOUDI ALSO SEEMED TO HAVE AN "IDEE FIXE" THAT HE WAS NOT WELCOME AT THE WHITE HOUSE.

2. DE COMMINES SAID THE FRENCH WERE NOT ENTIRELY CLEAR ABOUT WHAT HAD BROUGHT ABOUT THE MERGER AND THE RAPID TUNISIAN PULL-BACK. HE THOUGHT MASMOUDI, WHO HAD GOOD RELATIONS WITH QADHAFI AND SERVED AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES, MIGHT HAVE PUT BOURGUIBA BEFORE A FAIT ACCOMPLI JANUARY 12. WITH FULL KNOWLEDGE THAT IT WOULD PROBABLY FAIL, MASMOUDI MAY HAVE BEEN TRYING TO STAGE AN ALL-OR-NOTHING COUP TO REGAIN HIS WANING INFLUENCE. CERTAINLY PRIMIN NOUIR WAS NOT AWARE OF THE PROJECTED UNION AND THE TUNISIAN RETICENCE ABOUT GOING FORWARD WITH IT DEVELOPED QUICKLY AFTER NOURIA'S RETURN TO TUNIS. DE COMMINES INDICATED THAT MASMOUDI HAD BEEN SLATED TO BECOME FOREIGN MINISTER OF THE UNION WHILE QADHAFI HAD WANTED TO BECOME CHIEF OF THE UNION ARMY, A GOAL THAT DE COMMINES THOUGHT MIGHT HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO TUNISIAN APPREHENSIONS.

3. DE COMMINES ALSO TOUCHED ON "RUMORS" WHICH, HE SAID, MAY OR MAY NOT HAVE ANY FOUNDATION. ONE STORY HAS IT THAT MASMOUDI PLOTTED WITH QADHAFI TO ACHIEVE THE UNION WITH THE INTENTION OF OVERTHROWING BOURGUIBA AND PUTTING IN AN ENTIRELY NEW TEAM COMPOSED OF MEN NOW IN THE TUNISIAN OPPOSITION. ANOTHER RUMOR (WHICH HAD COME THROUGH FRENCH INTELLIGENCE SOURCES BUT FOR WHICH THERE IS NO OTHER CONFIRMATION) IS TO THE EFFECT THAT PRIMIN JALLOUD OPPOSED THE JERBA MERGER AND WISHES TO REMOVE QADHAFI.

4. DE COMMINES DESCRIBED THE UNION AS MAKING SOME SENSE. TUNISIA ALREADY HAS TOO MANY CADRES AND WORKERS AND LIBYA MIGHT PROVIDE JOBS FOR THEM AND SOME OF THE 50,000 WORKERS FOR WHOM THE NEW TUNISIAN FIVE-YEAR PLAN ANTICIPATES WORK MUST BE CREATED EACH YEAR. TUNISIA COULD USE LIBYAN INVESTMENT FUNDS, AND JOINT EXPLORATION OF THE NOT-YET-DELINEATED COASTAL SHELF MIGHT BE PROFITABLE TO BOTH COUNTRIES. MOREOVER, TUNISIA HAS STRONG RACIAL TIES WITH LIBYA; BOURGUIBA HIMSELF IS OF LIBYAN EXTRACT, SAID DE COMMINES. HE ADMITTED THAT THE VERY DIFFERENT MORALITY OF THE TWO HEADS OF STATE POSES EXTREMELY DIFFICULT PROBLEMS
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FOR ANY MERGER.

5. AS FOR EFFECTS OF THE ABORTED UNION, DE COMMINES THOUGHT BOURGUIBA'S PRESTIGE WOULD BE SERIOUSLY WEAKENED. QADHAFI, HOWEVER, WOULD BE LITTLE AFFECTED. HE IS "HORS SERIES" AND WILL CONTINUE TO FIND HIS FORCE IN ARAB UNITY AND MUSLIM ZEALOTRY. YOUNG AND LIKEABLE (HE MADE A GOOD IMPRESSION ON PARIS JOURNALISTS, SAID DE COMMINES),

QADHAFI WILL PROBABLY CONTINUE TO LET QUALIFIED MEN RUN THE ECONOMY AND THE LATEST REBUT BY THOSE WHO DO NOT SHARE HIS KNOWLEDGE OF THE "TRUE WAY" WILL NOT BOTHER HIM.

6. IN CONCLUSION, DE COMMINES NOTED THAT HUMAN AND ECONOMIC CONTACT STILL EXIST BETWEEN TUNISIA AND LIBYA AND SAID THAT WHILE THE UNION IDEA MIGHT BE STALLED, IT IS NOT DEAD.
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